

S. G. F. Brandon

**The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church***A Study of the Consequences of the Jewish Catastrophy in the Year 70 for Christianity*

Profil, Zagreb, 2006, 221 pages

Before us is a book with an interesting title and an even more interesting subtitle. Since the subtitle is very bashfully underlaid on the first page of the book, an unwary reader would think it is about the conquest of Jerusalem in the crusades, or the “Fall of Jerusalem” into the crusaders’ hands. However, such hasty hopes are dispersed in the foreword that the author offers. Every reader expecting some theory of a church plot that hid something about Jesus’ private life in order to establish its authority in the world, like, for example, the books: *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, *Messianic Legacy* or *The Da Vinci Code* will not be satisfied. In fact, they will be disappointed. The book is a serious study with the subject of the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 into Roman hands. The book finds its way to the reader precisely because the importance of this subject for Christianity in this country has been marginalized for years, and not accidentally. This is a huge subject that needs experts such as Brandon.

Brandon was a professor of comparative religion and, as such, he is not a specialized historian or theologian but a competent connoisseur who, with surgical precision, dissects political occurrences that led to the political crisis in the fifties of the first century and that will culminate with the fall of Jerusalem. The subtext of the whole book is that the historians of Christianity did not elaborate upon the relationship between the destruction of the

temple and the creation of the church clearly enough. The theological and political significance of the Four Year War, that is the Jewish occupation of Jerusalem, is of great importance for Brandon. Not only because it is a time of political instability in the Roman empire which, in those four years, changed emperors four times, but first and foremost because Vespasian’s conquest of Jerusalem aided the depopulation of the Jews. Brandon connects rebellion, siege and the Roman conquest of Jerusalem on one side and the depopulation of Jews which had the creation and writing of the Gospels as a consequence on the other side. Writing the Gospels, according to Brandon, was not just an interpretation of painful political occurrences from 66-70, but also first and foremost, it constituted the church in a specific, and the author would say reactionary, way, rehabilitating all of its actors. The writers of the Gospels were, according to him, ecclesial interpreters of Jewish political theological history with the help of the person of Jesus Christ, which Paul had already once interpreted to the Gentiles that converted to Christianity.

Even though the author introduces many historical facts, insights, and comments, we cannot escape the feeling that his interpretation of the Gospels still wears the patina of time. A hermeneutic form comes from the text that was very modern after the Second World War. Unfortunately, that is the objection of the whole

book. The whole text is determined through argumentation that stays imprisoned by ambivalent anacronisms, so typical for the liberal theology of the late fourties. It seems that Brandon's theme did not remain without response. Brandon is stalking through the margins and footnotes of the so-called "second historic search for Jesus." A glance at the authors he quotes is eno-

ugh to conclude that the text is far from becoming a classic or a good guide to the subject. That is how this slightly unfinished text should be read: as an anticipation of the so-called "third search for the historic Jesus." I would definitely recommend this book to a serious student of theology who is thinking about post graduate studies in theology.

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